

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 SSM-03 IO-13 DHA-05 /078 W  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 740  
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
USMISSION SINAI  
AMEMBASY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 17485

3.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: EG SHUM PINT  
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH BISHOP SAMUEL

REFS (A) CAIRO 15545, (B) CAIRO 17416

SUMMARY: COPTS REMAINED CONCERNED OVER POSSIBLE ISLAMIC  
LEGISLATION BUT RELYING ON SADAT'S ASSURANCES THAT THIS  
WILL NOT OCCUR. EXTREMIST, REPRESENTING "SONS OF MARTYRS",  
ARRESTED. UNIVERSITIES RELAXED. COPTS HOPE ASSIUT GOVERNOR  
WILL GO. HIGH LEVEL ATTENDANCE AT INAUGURATION ST. MARK'S  
HOSPITAL INDICATIVE OF IMPROVED INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS.  
END SUMMARY.

1. COPTIC CONCERNS. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF OCTOBER 12,  
BISHOP SAMUEL REPORTED COPTS STILL CONCERNED OVER POSSIBILITY  
THAT CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM GROUP WILL PUSH ISLAMIC LEGIS-  
LATION IN NEXT SESSION PEOPLES ASSEMBLY. AS NOTED REF B,  
SAMUEL SAID BILLS HAVE NOT BEEN WITHDRAWN AND COULD STILL  
REACH ASSEMBLY FLOOR FOR DEBATE. SHOULD THIS HAPPEN,  
HE FEARED THEY WOULD PASS WITH OVERWHELMING MAJORITY SINCE  
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FEW PARLIAMENTARIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO OPPOSE ISLAMIC  
PRINCIPLES PUBLICLY. COPTIC COMMUNITY, HE CONTINUED, IS  
RELYING ON ASSURANCES GIVEN BY SADAT AND SALIM THAT  
GOVERNMENT WILL KEEP PROPOSALS BOTTLED UP IN EXECUTIVE  
AND WILL NOT LET THEM REACH ASSEMBLY. SAMUEL WAS HEARTENED  
BY SADAT'S RECENT PRONOUNCEMENTS ON RELIGION AND REPEATEDLY  
STRESSED HIS BELIEF IN PRESIDENT'S SINCEREITY ON THIS ISSUE.

IN PASSING, SAMUEL IDENTIFIED PRIME MOVER FOR ISLAMIC LEGISLATION AS SHEIKH SALAH ABU ISMAIL, WHO HE SAID IS FORMER PRIVATE SECRETARY TO SHEIKH AL AZHAR AND STILL CONNECTED WITH INSTITUTION.

2. COPTIC EXTEEMISM. SAMUEL DENIED CHARGE CHURCH HAVING ANY DIFFICULTY CONTROLLING COPTIC EXTREMISTS. RUMORS, HE MAINTAINED, WERE GENERATED BY ARREST OF SINGLE INDIVIDUAL WHO WAS APPREHENDED DISTRIBUTING INFLAMMATORY PAMPHLETS, BOTH IN EGYPT AND ABROAD, IN NAME OF "SONS OF MARTYRS". SAMUEL CLAIMED INDIVIDUAL, STUDENT PURSING MASTERS DEGREE IN ARCHEOLOGY, WAS SOLE MEMBER OF ORGANIZATION. SAMUEL ADMITTED THAT NUMBER OF COPTS WERE ARRESTED RECENTLY IN UPPER EGYPT FOR ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF ARMS BUT SAID THEY HAD NO CONNECTION WITH STUDENT. CONCLUDED THIS A CULTURAL PROBLEM: MEN IN UPPER EGYPT, COPTS AND MUSLIMS ALIKE, ARE EXPECTED TO GO ARMED. (SAMUEL'S EXPLANATION STRIKES US AS SOMEWHAT GLIB. WE HAVE HEARD REPEATED REPORTS OF EXTREMIST COPTIC ORGANIZATIONS CENTERED IN UPPER EGYPT. "SONS OF MARTYRS" MAY BE CONNECTED. POLICE, AT ANY RATE, ARE NOT TAKING MATTER LIGHTLY; STUDENT IS STILL IN JAIL.)

3. MUSLIM EXTREMISM. SAMUEL OBSERVED THAT TAKFIR TRIAL HAS REDUCED OVERT SIGNS OF MUSLIM EXTREMIS. ACTIVITY OF ISLAMIC GROUPS ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, WHICH RECENTLY

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REOPENED FOR FALL TERM, ARE MARKEDLY DOWN FROM LAST YEAR. GROUPS WILL IN EXISTENCE AND CONTINUE RECRUITING MEMBERS BUT ARE NOT HARRASSING CHRISTIAN STUDENTS, NOR ARE THEY DISRUPTING CLASSES AS THEY DID IN PAST.

4. CABINET RESHUFFLE. SAMUEL, WHO IS MEMBER CENTRAL COMMITTEE SALIM'S PARTY, SAID PM HAD CONSULTED PARTY ONLY MINIMALLY IN DRAWING UP LIST OF NEW CABINET MINISTERS. AS PAPERS REPORTED, SALIM OUTLINED HIS GOALS IN RESHUFFLE (WHICH SAMUEL SAID BASICALLY BOIL DOWN TO NEED RETIONALIZE EGYPTIAN MINISTRERIAL STRUCTURE BY CONSOLIDATING SIMILAR ACTIVITIES IN SINGLE MINISTRY), BUT DID NOT GIVE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ANY INDICATION WHO NEW MINISTERS WILL BE. PM PROMISED TO INFORM THEM BEFORE MKAKING LIST PUBLIC. SAMUEL NOTED THERE HAD BEEN RUMORS THAT DEPREIMIN KAISSOUNI WOULD BE DROPPED; SAID THIS NOW UNLIEKLY SINCE GOE RECOGNIZES KAISSOUNI'S UNIQUE INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION AND FEARS CREDIT RATING MIGHT FALL WITH DEPARTURE DEPRIMIN.

5. GOVERNORS. ON MOOTED SHIFT OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS, SAMUEL, NOT SURPRISINGLY, EXPRESSD HOPE THAT FIRST TO GO WILL BE GOVERNOR OF ASSIUT (WHERE MOST OF RECENT MUSLIM-

COPTIC TROUBLE OCCURRED). HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT ASSIUT'S MUSLIMS HAVE BEGUN LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO SADAT ON GOVERNOR'S BEHALF. THEY HAD ATTEMPTED, WITH LITTLE SUCCESS, TO ENLIST COPTS IN THIS EFFORT. SAMUEL SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT RESULTS WOULD BE BUT CONTINUED HOPE SADAT WOULD RESIST PRESSURE AND REMOVE GOVERNOR. SAID PRESIDENT AND SALIM AWARE COPTIC FEELINGS ON THIS ISSUE.

6. ST. MARK'S STONE. SAMUEL WAS ELATED BY HIGH-LEVEL TURNOUT AT CORNORSTONE LAYING CEREMONY FOR ST. MARK'S HOSPITAL AND WAS PARTICULARLY GRATIFIED BY SADAT'S REMARKS ON OCCASION. HE REGRETED THERE WAS MINIMAL ATTENDANCE BY DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND PLACED BLAME ON FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR LATE DELIVERY OF INVITATIONS (WE RECEIVED OURS WHILE CONFIDENTIAL

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CEREMONY WAS IN PROGRESS). SAMUEL ALSO REGRETED FACT THAT NONE OF SHEIKS FROM AL AKHAR ATTENDED. HE HAD PERSONALLY INVITED SHEIKH AL AZHAR AND MUFTI. LATER HAD ACCEPTED AND WAS EXPECTED DELIVER BRIEF REMARKS. HOWEVER, HIS SON CAME DOWN WITH "SUDDEN APPENDICITIS ATTACK" WHICH PRECLUDED MUFTI'S ATTENDANCE. SAMUEL SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN PATRIARCHATE AND AL AZHAR BUT SAID THIS DIFFICULT. AL AZHAR REFUSES PERMIT COPTS ATTEND EVEN SECULAR COURSES AT UNIVERSITY.

7. COMMENT: SAMUEL WAS MORE RELAXED ON INTERCOMMUNAL ISSUE THAN DURING LAST MEETING (REF A). HE CLEARLY FEELS MUSLIM-COPTIC CRISIS IS OVER, AT LEAST FOR MOMENT, BUT PATRIARCHATE INTENDS REMAIN ON GUARD AGAINST ANY FURTHER EFFORTS TO DENIGRATE COPTIC POSITION IN EGYPT.  
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## Message Attributes

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